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## ABSTRACT

Parents and teachers need to be involved in teaching children to read and to enjoy reading. There are three planks in a platform that will help all parents become involved in their children's learning to read. First, parents must set the example. If they want their children to read, parents must read around them and to them. Secondly, they must follow up on reading. This follow-up could involve helping youngsters to write and bind their own books, taping excerpts of youngsters reading favorite parts of books, creating book character "parades," and watching TV shows about books. Besides learning that reading is important, the child usually learns to love to read. The parents' final responsibility in teaching reading is to find out about, participate in, evaluate, and make requests of the instructional program at the child's school. A "Twenty Questions" list can help the parent fulfill this responsibility. By reading to their youngsters, reacting with them to books, and overseeing school programs parents can teach their children to read and to enjoy reading. (MG)

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### Parents Teach Reading, Too

Linda Nixon Clary

There is an important campaign that parents and teachers need to join. That campaign is to be involved in teaching children to read and to enjoy reading. Specifically, there are three planks in such a platform that will help all parents become involved in their children's learn to read. First, parents must set the example. Secondly, they must follow up on reading, and, finally, they must become part of the instructional program in their child's school. Each of these points is individually important, but they become more powerful when considered together.

The old adage "Do as I say, not as I do" won't work when it comes to teaching children to read. Absolutely the most powerful teacher that they have is the examples or models that we set for them. If we want them to read a lot, we must read a lot around them and we must read to them, from the time they are born--or even before! Ruth Love is quoted in the book The Read-Aloud Handbook, a truly excellent source for parents with useful lists of books for different subjects and age levels, as saying that "If we could get our parents to read to their preschool children 15 minutes a day, we could revolutionize the schools." Indeed, all across the world, this factor seems to be the major characteristic that distinguishes children who start to read early and remain good readers. They are read to and talked with (not to) about books! Their writing, speaking, and listening vocabularies are greater, they write better themselves, their spoken language is more complex, and their listening skills even improve. Therefore, as parents, we must let our children see us reading, and we must read to and with our youngsters each and every day! In fact setting

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aside 15 minutes or so a day for SQUIRT - sustained quiet reading time, is a good idea. We must make going to the library a priority, and we must try to buy books and magazines for gifts.

Actually, reading to children and with them can be a very pleasant experience. There are many excellent books published for youngsters that adults can enjoy, too. This shorter length happens to be one of the major differences in children's and adult literature. The other is that the writing is directed toward the cognitive level of youngsters, so that they will be able to understand. But, otherwise, children's books have all the same aspects of any good literature - good stories, with well described characters and settings that often lead us to an important underlying meaning.

In The Read-Aloud Handbook, Trelease quotes a poem entitled "The Reading Mother" that summarizes the importance of reading to children:

"You may have tangible wealth untold:  
Caskets of jewels and coppers of gold,  
Richer than you can never be--  
I had a Mother who read to me."

A second suggestion for teaching children to read is to do "things" with books. These "things" may be fun activities, such as having a neighborhood book characters' parade or writing family plays about books. Help youngsters write and bind their own books, and add them to the family library or send them to grandparents for gifts. Let them make booklets of new and interesting words that they learn from their reading. Parents can make a book, too, and model finding higher-level words. Tape excerpts of youngsters reading favorite parts of books or your family doing choral readings to play on your car or portable cassette players. Play "I'm thinking of" games with descriptions of books you've both read or with interesting words you have found when reading. Watch TV shows about books such as the excellent "Reading Rainbow" series on ETV.

Then talk about these shows and buy or check out the book for reading.

You might even want to do an activity called a literature web where you use one book as a springboard for several different activities. An example might be one of the humorous Amelia Bedelia books by Peggy Parrish. Amelia gets awfully mixed up when she tries to follow directions, and she checks the laundry by drawing checks on the clothes; she strings beans by threading them on a string, and she strips the sheets by cutting them into pieces. Her one redemption is the book Thank you, Amelia Bedelia is a delicious apple pie that she makes for Great Aunt Myra! A web might include writing a letter to Peggy Parrish, finding other books by the author at the library, baking an apple pie and planting the seeds, making a checked T shirt Amelia's way, drawings of favorite parts of the story for the display on the refrigerator door, and taping the story to send to relative or friends.

Sometimes the use of a book involves working on solving a problem that the child has through reading and talking about the story where the characters deal with similar difficulties. Some widely used texts include the following: sibling rivalry in Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing and Superfudge; new babies, Peter's Chair; spending the night away from home, Ira Sleeps Over; divorce, Dear Mr. Henshaw; death of a pet. The Tenth Good Thing about Barney; bad days, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day; and death of a friend, A Taste of Blackberries.

Using books in all of these ways shows your child that you find books valuable and helpful. These activities communicate, without your saying so, that it's important to read and that you learn when you read. They teach far more easily and effectively than all of the workbooks and ditto sheets in the world, all of your drilling on sight words, or all of your rules about reading so many books a week or a month. Additionally, the child usually learns to love to read and to want to read! Orville Prescott quoted in The Read-Aloud Handbook,

"Few children learn to love books by themselves. Someone has to lure them into the wonderful world of the written word; someone has to show them the way."

Your final responsibility in teaching reading is to find out about, participate in, evaluate, and make requests of the instructional program in your child's school. Perhaps the easiest way to do that is with a "Twenty Questions" list that can help you fulfil this responsibility. Remember that schools belong to parents and taxpayers, not teachers or administrators or board members, and you deserve to know about and to make suggestions for the instructional program. A possible list of twenty questions might include the following:

1. Is my child read to everyday at school as an important part of the day?
2. Do I hear about activities at school involving children's literature books, not just the reading textbook?
3. Am I asked to volunteer to read aloud at school?
4. Am I asked to donate books or money for books for school?
5. Am I asked to support the library with time and money and work on book fairs? (Often, financial support for buying books is really needed and can be "adopted" by PTO's or civic groups or businesses.)
6. Does my child react regularly with enthusiasm about projects involving reading and writing, such as making murals about books or having "Character Look Alike Days" or writing a letter to an author?
7. Does my child's school participate in the S.C. Children's Book Award Contest? (If not, this is an excellent PTO project.)
8. Are there regular homework assignments, not in addition to other work, that involve my reading to my child or his reading to me?
9. Are homework assignments infrequent that involve drilling on sounds or words for more than 10-20 minutes at a time?

10. Does the reading program in my child's school have a recreational reading strand that is part of the core curriculum, not a frill?
11. Does the reading program help my child learn to read for information from different types of books?
12. Do I get information about all aspects of my child's reading performance, not just his test scores?
13. Is the ability to read silently with comprehension stressed for my child?
14. When I visit classrooms, is the emphasis on silent reading and good discussion afterwards, rather than skill pages?
15. Is my child's program of study modified when he reads better or poorer than classmates, and am I notified when such changes are made?
16. Is there plenty of time allowed to read books for practice at school?
17. Are teachers and administrators willing to answer my questions and accept and try solutions to problems?
18. Do my child's work pages from school indicate that he usually performs at least at a 70% level on daily work that involves lots of different reading tasks?
19. Is there more to the reading curriculum than just a basic set of books that teachers and administrators know and use?
20. Does my child like to read?

"Yes" answers to all these questions would suggest that your school is definitely fulfilling its role as your partner in teaching your child to read. Less than 14 positive responses would point out some areas that you might want to work to help your school improve. Between 15 and 19 "yes" replies indicates a satisfactory program but one that probably could be even better.

One source of help for improving our habits as parents at home and our input at school is the International Reading Association and the books and

pamphlets they publish. There are a large number available, but some free pamphlets include "Good Books Make Reading for Your Child," "You Can Encourage Your Child to Read," "Studying - Ways Parents Can Help" and "You Can Use Television to Stimulate Your Child's Reading Habits." Send a SASE for each to IRA, P.O. Box 8137, Newark, Delaware, 19711.

Now, as parents, we must assure that by our reading to youngsters, reacting with them to books, and overseeing our school's programs that we change the current situation where, as Jim Trelease suggests, "two out of three children can't read, won't read, or hate to read." Then, we as parents, will indeed teach reading, too.

Most all of us who are parents and who like to read and read a lot by choice do not remember our test scores or what we learned from reading workbooks. What we do remember is being read to by loving adults, reading and sharing many books in pleasant ways, and schools and parents that encouraged both of those endeavors.

#### References

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